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ABSTRACT

This conference report argues that folk arts, which are transmitted informally by community word of mouth and example, represent the core culture of the community. Since a central goal for education is to prepare students to understand, live in, and contribute to their culture, the traditional folk arts represent valuable classroom resources. They are a cross disciplinary arts component of a child-centered education. This concise summary of proceedings from the conference includes recommendations of the National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education, especially calling for a more prominent role for folk and traditional arts in federal and state education policy. The report concludes with lists of participants and key organizations as resources. (MM)

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Folk Arts in the Classroom

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Changing the Relationship Between Schools and Communities

SO 024 368

A Report from the National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

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Folk Arts in the Classroom

Changing the Relationship Between Schools and Communities

When you have a passion for your own traditions, you are sensitive to the traditions of others.

Juan Gutiérrez, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Cover photo Juan Gutiérrez performing a bomba with Isaac Chape-Tanco in Queens, New York.
Photo by Martha Cooper, Queens Council on the Arts.

A Report from the National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Convened by City Lore with support from the National Endowment for the Arts
May 3 and 4, 1993

Preface

There are two ways to preserve folk culture. You can pickle it and put it on the shelf, or you can share the seed.

Ralph Rinzler, Smithsonian Institution

In the field of folk arts, we don't bring the arts to the people, we highlight the arts from the people; we believe the arts should be of and by as well as for the people.

Dan Sheehy, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

On May 3 and 4, 1993, the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts and City Lore, a cultural center in New York, co-sponsored Folk Arts in the Classroom: A National Roundtable on Folk Arts in Education. The conference grew out of the burgeoning interest in the role folk arts can play in the education of our children, an interest evidenced in more than a hundred folk arts in education projects nationwide. It also emerged from the realization that folk and traditional arts offer methodologies that can help resolve issues and implement the ideas raised in the clamor for education reform.

At the Roundtable, held at NEA in Washington, DC, more than thirty folklorists, teachers, school administrators, traditional artists, and specialists in multicultural education met to share ideas, discuss the state of the field, and make recommendations for augmenting the role of folk and traditional arts in education. Sessions included an overview of the field; presentations by teachers, traditional artists, school principals, and directors of folklore institutes for teachers; and a dialogue with leading figures in related educational initiatives, including Foxfire, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, the National Standards Initiative, the Music Educators National Conference, and a number of new multicultural education programs at Bank Street College of Education, Teachers College at Columbia, and the University of Washington (see p. 14 for a list of participants).

The recommendations in this document were made by the core working committee at the meeting, a group of leading folklorists working in educational settings. These recommendations are a first step toward realizing our mission to strengthen the ties between schools and communities and to enhance the educational experience by tapping one of our nation's greatest assets — the artistic and cultural knowledge embedded in the deep and diverse traditions of its citizens.

Ruby Wang, Chinese American calligrapher demonstrating brush holding techniques at the Roberson Museum, Binghamton, New York. Photo by Bruce Wrighton.

Introduction

Folklore is our capacity for shaping deeply felt values into meaningful forms.

Dell Hymes, Professor of Folklore, University of Virginia

Folk arts–and the affiliated terms folklore, folklife, and traditional arts–are the traditional artistic expressions of closely knit groups. They include a rich variety of expressions, such as music and songs, tales and legends, children's rhymes and games, occupational practices, rituals, celebrations, foods, crafts, beliefs, and customs. Traditional arts are transmitted informally, by word of mouth and example in the community. They represent the core of the cultures in which we live our daily lives. Since a central goal for education is to prepare our students to understand, live in, and contribute to their culture, folklore and the traditional arts represent a crucial resource for the classroom teacher.

As I think back over my own history as a learner, I have never been able to learn and remember anything that I could not somehow relate to my own life. Folk arts are about building bridges across the moats that separate the students' own selves from the ivory towers of knowledge.

Steve Zeitlin, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

The arts bring the transcendent qualities of the imagination into our lives and classrooms; in the folk or traditional arts, these qualities are encoded in shared forms that play an active role in people's lives and communities. "You can never divine how art will hit a person," Maritza McDonald noted at the National Roundtable; for that reason, we must expose children to a wide range of artistic expression, including the folk and traditional arts of their own and other communities. The traditional arts can spark an imagination in which all the arts will eventually burn brightly. Dewey Balfa, the renowned Louisiana traditional fiddler and an artist in the schools, has said, "Now that our Cajun young people have a better sense of their own music, maybe it's time for them to study Beethoven."

A foundation of knowledge about one's own traditions is valuable in and of itself; at the same time, it provides a grounding that allows students to understand more fully the wider cultural universe of classical and contemporary artistry. "While we want our children to be exposed to a variety of art forms and cultures," writes folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her essay, *The Accessible Aesthetic*, "we do not want them to be alienated from their birthright, their own heritage." She continues,

A major factor in effective education is the integration of what is learned in the school with the experiences children have in their homes and communities. An equal challenge is the integration of the culture of the community into the curriculum. And their own heritage is valuable, not only because it is their own, but also because of the importance of a strong indigenous culture to the coherence of community life....Folk artists are our indigenous teachers.

Folk and traditional arts embody community aesthetics, identity, and values; they are not just about techniques, skills, or pieces of information, but about people and a way of engaging the world, learning about the world, responding to and being responsible for the world. Folk arts begin with the assumption that every student brings into the classroom a valuable body of knowledge that includes art and customs from their own communities. A pedagogical process that uses the

We can find ourselves in other people's traditions. The first time I walked into a Chinese restaurant it was by word of mouth — that's how folk traditions work, right? I reached out and I took that tradition in. Now I eat Chinese food several times a week. When I demonstrate bomba and plena music in the schools I ask the students to reach out and take our tradition in.

Juan Gutiérrez, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Ultimately, the classroom is no less valid a setting for cultural transmission than a grandmother's parlor, the barbershop, or the front stoop.

Marjorie Hunt, Mary Hufford, Steve Zeitlin, *The Grand Generation*

students' own lives and communities as a starting point and a basic point of reference must place folk and traditional arts at the core of the curriculum; folk arts are the arts component of a child-centered education. Exploring traditional culture and incorporating folk artists into the curriculum have proven value for the teaching of:

Oral language skills
Written language skills
Reading skills
Cultural literacy
Social studies
Math
Problem solving
Art
Music
Science
Literature
Study skills
Creative thinking

In a world where schools are often alienated from local communities; where young people may have little contact with grandparents or older adults; where students may graduate from high school functionally illiterate; where children watch television for as many hours as they are in school; where families frantically juggle jobs and child care — folk arts can be part of the solution.

Elisa Perez demonstrating Puerto Rican doll making in Queens, New York. Photo by Martha Cooper, Queens Council on the Arts.

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Why Folk Arts?

When our young people walk into a school building anywhere in this country, it is what they're there to lose that is most apparent to them. In education, we must show our young people that the things they create in life have value, have worth — and, in fact, should be celebrated.

Mary Kay Penn, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the classroom

Educators are often intent on teaching the arts of "other cultures." For folklorists, the "other" is us.

Paddy Bowman, Testimony on the National Standards for Arts in Education

The Case for Folk and Traditional Arts in Education

Folk arts bring together a body of information not held elsewhere, including narratives, songs, customs, beliefs, and crafts that are at the heart of culture.

Folk arts help people remember their connections to each other as members of the same community and help outsiders understand the way of life of a community; studying folk arts promotes tolerance.

Folk arts offer multiple perspectives on the curriculum, revitalizing it through hands-on, interactive, intimate, cross-cultural, and culturally representative programs.

Folk arts provide teachers with multilingual and multicultural resources.

Folk arts bring the community into the classroom and forge a link between school and home, building bridges between the community and the curriculum.

Folk arts dovetail with current educational theories such as Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which honors all the types of knowledge students acquire; whole-language reading and writing, for which the traditional arts can provide new materials; process-method writing, for which traditional arts provide intimate, inspiring subjects; and interdisciplinary projects that incorporate social studies, language arts, science, math, photography, recording, art, or music.

Folk arts can be used at all grade levels, are interdisciplinary, and connect with all students — gifted, at-risk, and all those in between.

Folk arts are intergenerational, bringing young people into contact and communication with older adults.

Folk arts taught in schools and other educational settings help strengthen communities by validating their art forms in a formal setting.

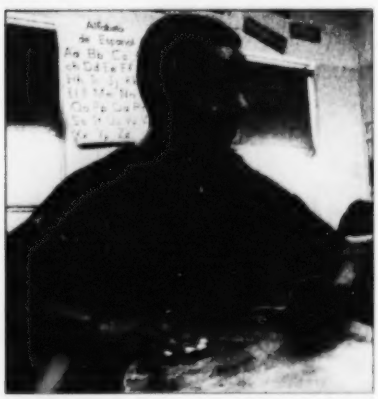
The process of studying **folk arts** integrates oral and written communication. With a strong emphasis on storytelling and other verbal forms, the traditional arts can play a central role in developing writing, literacy, and all communication skills.

Students do not necessarily understand that they have traditional art, knowledge, and culture. Studying **folk arts** and traditional culture bolsters self-knowledge and self-esteem, helping students understand what they already know.

Genuine change in the educational system must come from the top down and the bottom up.

Elizabeth Simons,
National Roundtable
on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Photo by Martha Cooper, Queens Council on the Arts.



Student at IS 218, Washington Heights, New York. Photo by Hazel Hankin, City Lore.

Residency in Puerto Rican music conducted by Los Pleneros de la 21, at IS 218, Washington Heights, New York City. Photo by Hazel Hankin, City Lore.

Selma Virunurm demonstrating Estonian woodburning in Cumberland County, New Jersey. Courtesy Rita Moonsamy, New Jersey Council on the Arts.

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Change from the Top Down:

Mission Statement
National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education

The National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education, a network of folklorists, folk artists, and other cultural specialists working in schools, universities, museums, arts agencies, and other educational institutions, advocates the full inclusion of folk and traditional arts and artists in our nation's education.

Is multiculturalism the caboose on the curricular train? Is it relegated to black history month, women's history month? Is it Cinco de Mayo and we forget about it on seis de mayo? Is it divorced from the curriculum? Is it colorful, but unlikely to be on the test?

Carlos F. Díaz, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

A National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education

At the last session of the National Roundtable, participants formed the National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education to articulate further and carry out the recommendations introduced at the Roundtable. Since then, funding has been attained through the Folk Arts Program and the Arts in Education Program at the National Endowment for the Arts to help launch the Task Force, and a coordinator has been hired. The immediate goals of the Task Force on Folk Arts in Education are to:

Work to include the traditional arts on state and national education agendas, in both the arts and humanities.

Build and support the network of folklorists and folk artists working in education.

Participate in relevant state and national education meetings.

Explore collaborations that support education reform.

Provide funding for Task Force members to attend key education meetings.

Serve as a clearinghouse for information on teacher institutes, resources, bibliographies, curricula, standards, assessment.

Work closely with the Folk Arts Program and the Arts in Education Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, and state, regional, and local arts councils.

Identify funding sources for folk and traditional arts in education.

Develop a strategic plan for making folk arts visible as a student-centered approach to cultural diversity.

Promote collaborations with teachers and other educators.

Publish folk arts in education articles in education journals, as well as in folklore publications.

Identify and make contact with potential partners deeply involved in classroom education, such as:

U.S. Department of Education
National Standards for Arts in Education
National Writing Project
Coalition of Essential Schools
New Compact for Learning

We do not automatically understand the art of cultures other than our own. Art exists in a social, cultural, and historical context and has the capacity to convey the cultural perspective of its maker, but only if we know how to seek this level of meaning. We live in a society in which people from diverse cultures often cannot understand one another. Many of us are intolerant of the dress, speech, music, foodways — the everyday art — of our neighbors. On an international level, we face economic difficulties often fueled by our limited understanding of "foreign" cultures. Comprehensive folk arts in education can prepare our students for a future that will require them to navigate between many cultures successfully.

Gail Matthews-DeNatale
National Task Force on Folk Arts
in Education

National Art Education Association
National Association for Curriculum Development
National Council for Teachers of English
National Council for Teachers of Social Studies
Getty Center for Education in the Arts
Arts Education Partnership Working Group
Kennedy Center Office of Education
Music Educators National Conference
National Association for Bilingual Education

Support folk arts in education outside as well as inside the classroom and identify potential partners, such as:

National 4-H
Tribal cultural centers
Boy Scouts of America
Girl Scouts of America
American Association of Museums
Community centers
Ethnic cultural centers
Corporation for National and Community Service
American Association of State and Local History
After-school programs
American Library Association

Mark Rust demonstrating Anglo-American musical traditions at Newark Valley Middle School. Photo by Bruce Wrighton, Roberson Museum.

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Change from the Top Down:

If there is no textbook, you can't teach it, that's reality. When my supervisor walks in, we can't be talking diversity, we can't be talking "no textbooks"; we must be talking behavioral objectives that match curricular objectives — as a teacher, I don't like it, but that's reality.

Kathy Smart, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Recommendations for a More Prominent Role for Folk and Traditional Arts in Federal and State Education Policy

Members of the Roundtable recognized the need to work at all levels to include folk and traditional arts in education. The following recommendations pertain to working at the national and state levels, with the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education taking a central role:

Commission in-depth evaluation studies of three or four model folk arts education projects; a meaningful evaluation can be used to support future grant proposals and education projects.

Explore ways to include folk arts in textbooks and curricula from a variety of disciplines. Develop specific folk arts and culture textbooks, manuals, and curricula along with audio and video materials adaptable for different grade levels. Explore CD Rom and other technologies as vehicles for teaching about the folk culture of particular regions and ethnic groups.

Strengthen the clearinghouses for folk and traditional arts materials such as the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the Bank Street/City Lore Center for Folk Arts in Education. Establish other regional clearinghouses based on these models and make them accessible to educators.

Work to incorporate folk and traditional arts into language arts, social studies, science, math, art, and music curricula.

Establish links with arts in education organizations to include traditional arts in their national advocacy efforts.

Consider developing heritage standards that would suggest how much students should know about their own cultural backgrounds and local communities at different grade levels. Highlight our shared heritage as well as our differences.

Flamenco dancers from the Carlota Santana Spanish Dance Company at the Queensborough Public Library. Photo by Martha Cooper, Queens Council on the Arts.

Change from the Bottom Up:

My grandfather said, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink." The purpose is not to make it drink but to create a thirst. That's what the folk arts project in the Bronx has been about. Students can talk about what folk arts are, they can identify the people in their community with special skills, and they get a different sense of self in the process.

Beverly Robinson, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom

Nana Korantemaa teaches a West African traditional dance. Photo by Richard Montemurro, New Jersey Council on the Arts.

Conducting Folk and Traditional Arts Projects in Educational Settings

What happens to young people in classrooms, museums, youth centers, and other educational settings is the ultimate test of any education initiative. The recommendations for working from the grassroots are to:

Encourage more interaction between university folklore departments and folklorists working in education, and between folklore departments and schools of education.

Strengthen existing teacher institutes and encourage new institutes and teacher training programs.

Identify model folk arts projects, curricula, and publications. Distribute bibliographies and resource guides widely to educators.

Work with Foxfire and its network of teachers, who share a similar educational philosophy, to implement our goals.

Advocate projects that explore and lead to an understanding of the folk culture of the school.

Use experienced folk artists to train other folk artists to participate in education programs.

Search for new ways to bring teachers and folklorists together in schools and other educational settings.

Develop a guidebook for folklorists conducting residencies and projects in a variety of educational settings.

A Look at What's Been Done

In that spot where the rubber hits the road, where students and educators come face to face with a folk artist or with their own and their neighbors' traditional culture, what happens? Here are a few examples of successful folk arts education projects from across the country.

North Dakota teachers gather each summer to study folklore and make field trips to communities such as the Lakota Sioux with folklorists and several traditional artists.

Traveling cultural "trunks" developed by a Florida folklorist provide art objects, artists' bios, audio-visuals, curriculum packets, transparencies, student activity sheets, and teacher guides to teachers across the state. The trunks are so popular, they must be booked two years in advance.

Student performing as part of an arts residency in Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Eric John, City Lore.

A pan pipe performance serves as the culminating event for a residency in Andean music in Queens, New York. Photo by Amanda Dargan, Queens Council on the Arts.

In Dallas, an elderly folk poet renews her interest in life through her work as an artist in residence. "My mother trained me to remember. You've got to train children to remember, too."

All over Michigan, thousands of 4-H youths participate in folklore projects through a long-standing program established by a folklorist.

An Arkansas folklorist spends three months with all the fourth graders in four schools, concentrating on folk arts and math skills through quilting, auctioneering, music, and other genres.

In New York City, high school students who are at risk academically meet with a folklorist every Saturday to continue their documentation of hip hop culture. The young people record oral histories of musicians and their styles. A university gives them access to a library for written research and a gallery for exhibits.

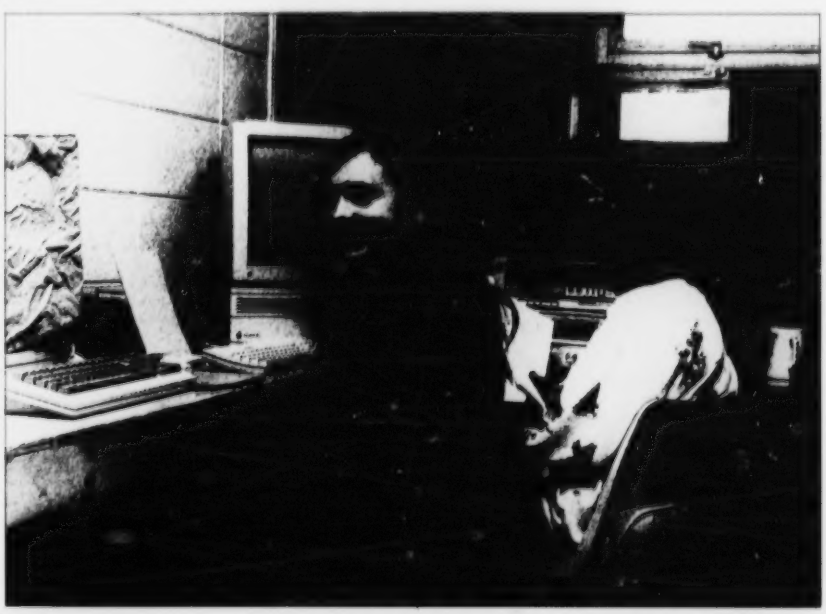
In South Carolina, teachers have enabled students to produce their own videos on community history and culture after training with a folklorist and video producer.

A California folklorist, who has worked many years in secondary schools, helps direct the National Writing Project and promotes folklore as a "hook" to inspire and improve students' writing.

A folklorist working in an upstate New York museum creates award winning exhibits on local culture. Teachers prepare the thousands of students who tour the exhibits each year through study guides and follow-up activities distributed by the museum.

A folklorist in Vermont works on the state curriculum committee for social studies.

Teachers in the twelve Foxfire networks throughout the country get students out into their communities to document local culture.



Jenny Lincoln and Celena Rogers share a light moment during the production of *Foxfire 10*. Courtesy of Foxfire.

What people must understand is that this art is not just decoration. It forms and shapes the human being. If you come from a country where children are starving to death, and then you come to this country which is so rich, you simply cannot explain why children are shooting each other. The reason must be that they don't have their culture. Your culture makes you think like a human being.

Tesfaye Tessema,
Ethiopian traditional artist

A teacher trained at the Smithsonian Folklife Program's institute for community scholars has incorporated folk arts into the curriculum of his home town schools in Iowa.

A Northern Virginia elementary school with a student body from dozens of countries succeeded in becoming a magnet school by working with folklorists to celebrate its diversity. PTA meetings offer interpreters in several languages, and a parent skills bank gives teachers a roster of traditional artists to call upon. An annual exhibit displays results of students' fieldwork.

At least five state arts councils fund folklorists as well as artists in residence at schools to survey communities and integrate local traditional arts and artists into classes.

Each year poets attending the annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Nevada stay an extra week to work in schools. Australian and New Mexican cowboys were the poets in residence this year.

Folklorists in Pennsylvania are developing state-wide standards for folklife in education and new assessment methods. Guidelines for folklorists' and traditional artists' residencies are already in place, and the state has a roster of traditional as well as classical artists for school programs statewide.

The Puente Project for Mexican-American students in Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Jose successfully engages students through folklore in the curriculum.

On New York's Lower East Side young folk arts researchers document the cultures around them in a highly successful after-school program, emphasizing "insider anthropology."

Albert Reeves shows students how to tie the kinds of knots that fisherman use along the Maurice River in New Jersey. Courtesy Rita Moonsamy, New Jersey Council on the Arts.

Conclusion

This summer I worked on the Children's Culture section of the Festival of American Folklife. Several folklorists went to local schools and playgrounds to find our experts who would perform. Some of our most talented performers were boys who play plastic bucket drums on the streets of Washington. The Bucket Brigade drummers performed twice a day during the festival. They filled the tent, and they knocked everyone out—kids and grown-ups, American and foreign visitors. The self-taught drumming that the boys perform, compose, and improvise is remarkable. One of them, Little James, is a master drummer at age ten. Yet when these children returned to school this fall, I'd bet not one teacher knew of their expertise and talent.... We need to ask students to share their music, dances, works of arts, verbal virtuosity. Students don't come to us blank slates. They are full of artistic accomplishments that often get overlooked, whether it is a camp song, a favorite hymn, or a Cambodian dance.

Paddy Bowman, Testimony on the National Standards for Arts Education

The recommendations of the National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom represent a first step in integrating folk and traditional arts into the nation's education. As the Task Force proceeds to tackle these goals, new ideas and needs will appear on the horizon. We close with these thoughts:

To folklorists and folk artists: Working to change educational policy and working in the schools offer our best chance to implement our vision for a world more grounded in community in the next generation.

To teachers and educators: The folk and traditional arts are a promising resource for reaching students "where they live."

To the many concerned citizens currently engaged in reforming American education: Our constituency of folk artists, tradition bearers, folklorists, and other culture specialists offers new partners for the struggles ahead!

Students from P.S. 161 (Central Harlem--CSD 5) surrounding storyteller Martha Herbert. Courtesy Teachers and Writers Collaborative.

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Folk Arts in the Classroom: A National Roundtable at the National Endowment for the Arts
Nancy Hanks Center, Washington, DC
May 3 and 4, 1993

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The National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education supports folklorists and folk artists working around the country in education and advocates incorporating folk arts fully into education.

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The American Folklife Center is the national center for services to state-based folklife programs (often within state arts councils) and houses a curriculum resource bank for folklore materials. Contact the Center to learn who your state folklorist is or for a copy of *A Teacher's Guide to Folklife Resources for K-12 Classrooms* (single copies free).

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4350 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 640
Arlington, VA 22203
703/528-1902

AFS is the major membership organization for academic and public folklorists. The Education Section publishes a newsletter twice yearly, maintains a mailing list, and organizes panels at AFS meetings.

Bank Street/City Lore Center for Folk Arts in Education
Bank Street College of Education
610 W. 112th Street
New York, NY 10025
212/875-4492
Contact: Nina Jaffe, Professor and Folk Arts in Education Specialist

This multicultural resource center for teachers is part of a new collaboration between folklorists and a college of education.

Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies Smithsonian Institution
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Washington, DC 20560
202/287-3424
fax: 202/287-3699
Contact: Betty Belanus, Folklife Specialist

The Center develops educational materials for teachers, supports community scholars, and houses resources such as Folkways Records.

Folk and Traditional Arts Program National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 710
Washington, DC 20506
202/682-5449
fax: 202/682-5699

This division of NEA funds many state folk arts programs, folk artists, and folk arts projects around the country. The program also administers the annual National Heritage Awards honoring the nation's folk arts masters.

Written by Steve Zeitlin, City Lore, and Paddy Bowman, National Task Force on Folk Arts in Education.

Designed by Stacy Weidenmuller, The Cooper Union Center for Design & Typography.

In the field of folk arts, we don't bring the arts to the people, we highlight the arts from the people; we believe the arts should be of and by as well as for the people.

Dan Sheehy, National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom